



TRANSECTS

NEWSLETTER

TRANSECTS is an innovative, transdisciplinary research training partnership that reconfigures sustainability science education, prepares graduates to be the next generation of sustainability change makers, and offers unparalleled opportunities for intercultural learning through shared international experiences and comparative analysis across the Global North and South.

To learn more about *TRANSECTS*, explore our newsletter, [visit our website](https://sens.usask.ca/transects), or reach out to us directly.

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Spencer Foundation Grant Awarded to *TRANSECTS* Team By Dr. Maureen G. Reed

We are pleased to announce that the Spencer Foundation has funded a team from *TRANSECTS* for a three-year project, beginning September 2024, entitled: Co-designing Transdisciplinary Sustainability Education. Our proposal asked: How can we transform sustainability education through inclusive and intercultural community-academic partnerships? We propose to establish, evaluate, and share innovative and inclusive educational practices in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves/Regions (BRs) in Canada and South Africa.

Our partnership of academics and Indigenous and rural practitioners (University of Saskatchewan, Mistawasis Nêhiyawak, Redberry Lake BR, Rhodes University, University of Witwatersrand, University of Venda, Vhembe BR, and Kruger to Canyon BR) will pilot Indigenous-led land-based education for sustainability researchers, local youth, and university students; co-design educational materials with Indigenous youth custodians working to address climate change; and strengthen skills of youth and practitioners to support ‘green enterprise development’. By co-creating transdisciplinary educational opportunities for sustainability in BRs, we will include multiple knowledge systems and ways of doing, redress power asymmetries, enhance equity in sustainability education, and improve our collective capacity to address context-specific sustainability challenges such as persistent poverty and biodiversity loss.



Image: *TRANSECTS* members and partners visiting Vhembe BR in Limpopo, South Africa, hosted by Dr. Lutendo Mugwedi, Tonderai Makoni, and BR youth members. Vhembe BR is a partner on the Spencer Foundation grant project: Co-designing Transdisciplinary Sustainability Education. Credit: Marlis Merry.

Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability: A Special Issue on Co-Designing Transdisciplinary International Learning Labs By Danielle Spence and Marlis Merry

Members of the *TRANSECTS* network have submitted a paper to a special issue of Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability (COSUST), titled “Intercultural Networks Deepen Learning for Transformative Sustainability Education: Lessons from Co-Designing Transdisciplinary International Learning Labs.” The paper introduces the Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab (TILL) and highlights the value of intercultural networks by sharing initial lessons on how collaborating across the intercultural network of *TRANSECTS* to co-create transdisciplinary learning opportunities deepened learning for transformational change.

Assessing Readiness and Building the Capacity of Biosphere Regions to Implement Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion By Dr. John Boakye-Danquah

TRANSECTS sponsored an environmental scan (e-scan) to review the websites of 17 Canadian BR websites to understand the status of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) implementation within BRs. For each BR website, all tabs were searched, particularly the “About” section, which provides information on the mission and vision statements, strategic objectives or plan (if any), and composition of the team and board of directors. We limited the search to broad EDI considerations and looked for terms such as “equity”, “diversity”, “diverse”, “equality”, “inclusion”, “accessibility”, “justice”, “minority”, “racialized”, “reconciliation”, and “SDG 5 and 10”. While we considered reconciliation efforts to be different from EDI, we included the word “reconciliation” in our search to understand the extent to which BRs are working towards advancing reconciliation.

The outcomes of the e-scan have been shared with both practitioners and academics at the 2024 EuroMAB Workshop in Germany and during the *TRANSECTS* Program Institute at Vancouver Island University (VIU). The next phase of this work involves engaging with BR practitioners across Canada to share the findings of the research, solicit feedback, and explore opportunities, including funding, to co-create resources, materials, and approaches that can support BRs to comprehensively enhance EDI knowledge and capacity.

The report by Dr. John Boakye-Danquah and Crenda Marfo, entitled "ASSESSING THE READINESS AND CAPACITY OF BIOSPHERE REGIONS TO IMPLEMENT EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION - A DESKTOP REVIEW" is now available and will be shared with the Canadian BRs directly.



Image: Dr. Maureen G. Reed presenting at the 2024 Program Institute on applying EDI in Canadian BRs. Credit: Marlis Merry.

Continued Education Offering for Professional Skills By Dr. Garrett Richards

TRANSECTS now has a draft continuing education framework, intended to complement other offerings (e.g. the foundational course, TILLS, and program institutes) as part of a diverse training portfolio. Emerging out of workshops, discussions, and student surveys, the framework identifies key professional skills (e.g. leadership for engagement, working in transdisciplinary teams, communicating to diverse audiences) across three main categories: preparing to do collaborative work, facilitating collaborative work, and knowledge mobilization. Dr. Garrett Richards, who is working with *TRANSECTS* as a Transdisciplinary Sustainability Specialist while on sabbatical leave from his permanent position at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, will be taking the lead on further development and implementation of the framework. The ultimate goal is to have professional skills modules and materials permanently available online, perhaps as part of the *TRANSECTS* Resource Platform, to supplement learning in other venues and sustain the "legacy" of *TRANSECTS* beyond the initial grant period.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Spreading the Word About *TRANSECTS*

By Dr. Maureen G. Reed

We are officially telling colleagues around the world about the work we are doing in *TRANSECTS*. In July, Maureen presented at the XVIII World Congress of Comparative Education Societies. While preparing for and presenting (virtually) at the Congress she met other UNESCO Chairs and Education colleagues around the world. She also presented to an international audience at a conference in Montreal sponsored by the Program on Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS). *TRANSECTS* alumni, Mariana Campos Rivera and Michaela Sidloski, presented on their research while Maureen discussed *TRANSECTS* at a special session dedicated to UNESCO designated-sites. Early career and longstanding researchers shared what they are learning when working with practitioners in UNESCO sites. Read more about the PECS-III sessions on our website: [“Doing equity justice in social-ecological systems research”](#) and [“Reflecting on research and knowledge co-production in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites”](#). *TRANSECTS* has also been featured in a photo exhibition at the UNESCO Chairs and Partners Forum: Transforming Knowledge for Africa’s Future (30 September – 2 October 2024, African Union Conference Center, Addis Ababa).

The special issue of the South African Journal of Science on [‘Sustainability Science Engagement and Engaged Sustainability Science’](#) has been published, featuring the first research paper from *TRANSECTS*: [“Evaluating innovation in transdisciplinary sustainability education: *TRANSECTS*’ international learning labs”](#) by Eureta Rosenberg, Jessica Cockburn, Maureen Reed, Wendy James, Jana Gengelbach, and Heike Walk.



Image: TILL 2024 trainees removing Scotch Broom with the Broombusters at Vancouver Island University. Credit: MABRRI.

Reflections on TILL 2024 By Kwanele Siyengo and Marlis Merry

TILL 2024, hosted by the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI) at VIU, welcomed 18 trainees on May 8th. The TILL trainee (“TILLie”) cohort was made up of graduate students from *TRANSECTS* partner universities in Canada, Germany, and South Africa. Accompanied by four mentors (Dr. James Robson, Dr. Felicitas Egonyu, Dr. Heike Molitor, and Dr. Bianca Currie) and a TILL alumni Peer Mentor (Kwanele Siyengo), the TILLies spent several weeks collaborating with MABRRI to investigate the impact that invasive species have on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the BR. TILL 2024 concluded with final presentations and a celebratory wrap-up event on June 15th and 16th. One TILLie has continued working with MABRRI to compile a comprehensive report and action plan based on the findings from all project teams.

Read about Kwanele’s experience at TILL 2024, available on our website.

**2024 International Program Institute:
Aligning Actions with Aspirations** By Marlis Merry

The latest Program Institute was held from June 17th to 19th, 2024, as a gathering for the international *TRANSECTS* network following TILL 2024. Held at VIU in Nanaimo, British Columbia, the event brought together 25 *TRANSECTS* members, partners, and TILL alumni. Attendees were actively involved in planning and facilitating, which fostered engagement and encouraged learning and exchange. The event also featured virtual presentations from colleagues in South Africa, including Dr. Lutendo Mugwedi (University of Venda; Vhembe Biosphere Reserve), Tonderai Makoni (Vhembe Biosphere Reserve), and Dr. Ludwig Chanyau (Rhodes University).

The Program Institute centered around the theme "MIND THE GAP: ALIGNING ACTIONS WITH ASPIRATIONS." As we near the midpoint of *TRANSECTS*, the 2024 Program Institute offered a valuable opportunity to evaluate our progress toward the original goals and intentions of the initiative and to explore ways to better align our actions with these objectives. The presentations and activities reflected this focus. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated and contributed to the success of the Program Institute. Read more about the 2024 International Program Institute in Canada [here](#).



Image: 2024 Program Institute participants visiting Cathedral Grove in the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region.

***TRANSECTS* Collaborates at a Workshop
During the 2024 EuroMAB** By Mariana Campos-Rivera

The *TRANSECTS* team is delighted to have collaborated with Drs. Ana Filipa Ferreira (Biosphere Reserves Institute, HNEE) and Dr. Valentin Fiala (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, BOKU) in the design and development of a workshop at the EuroMAB conference during July 2024. The workshop focused on developing guidelines that promote impactful research practices in UNESCO BRs. The discussions from this workshop were highly enriched by the enthusiastic engagement of the seventeen participants — researchers and practitioners from nine countries, who shared their valuable time and experiences with us. As part of the workshop’s activities, Dr. Jim Robson, Dr. Maureen Reed, and PhD Student Mariana Campos-Rivera presented the guiding principles for transdisciplinary sustainability research and practice that they, alongside other collaborators, have developed.

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Image: *TRANSECTS* members and TILL alumni reuniting at the 2024 EuroMAB. L-R: Jan Schormann, Elisa Igersheim, Pam Shaw, Angela Dichte, Mariana Campos-Rivera, Jana Gengelbach, Solomiia Hordasevych, Saleem Haddad, Denise Matias, John Boakye-Danquah, and Lutz Möller.

The workshop allowed people to discuss the opportunities and obstacles they encounter when doing research in BRs. Additionally, the workshop worked as a space to discuss ways to strengthen research practices and envision the desired characteristics of future research projects. We look forward to seeing how these learnings are used to create guidelines that support meaningful and collaborative research. We are grateful to Drs. Filipa and Valentin for inviting TRANSECTS to this important and joyful event.



Image: This image showcases the estuary at Nature's Valley, the main location for TILL 2025. Credit: Bianca Currie and Michael Klaver.



Image: Participants at the EuroMAB 2024 Workshop. Credit: Mariana Campos Rivera.

COMING UP

TRANSECTS Orientation and Engagement Event: Exploring Opportunities for Collaboration By Marlis Merry

Join us on December 10th for the *TRANSECTS* Orientation and Engagement Event. Whether you are a new or existing member of *TRANSECTS*, this virtual gathering is designed to bring together members of the *TRANSECTS* network to learn about upcoming initiatives, explore avenues for collaboration, and deepen engagement within our Community of Practice. Email transects@usask.ca for more information about this event.

TILL 2025: Gathering in the Garden Route

By Marlis Merry

The TILL is a fully funded international and intercultural learning experience for Senior Undergraduate students, Graduate students, and Postdoctoral Fellows. TILLs offer trainees the opportunity to deepen their professional, relational, and intercultural skills and provide an introduction to effectively apply transdisciplinary collaboration to tackle interconnected sustainability challenges.

In May and June of 2025, the TILL will be hosted by the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve (GRBR) in South Africa, consisting of an Online Foundational Course (April 14 – April 28, 2025) and an Onsite Learning Lab Program (May 3 – June 20, 2025). Under the mentorship of applied researchers and community partners, the international student teams will develop a systematic understanding of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the GRBR. Through a creative strategy design, trainee teams will address local issues that are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the GRBR's research and development needs.



Dr. Lutendo Mugwedi
UNIVEN



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders



Dr. Mags Blackie
RHODES



Linda Downsborough
RHODES



Dr. Ana Filipa Ferreira
HNEE

MEMBER PROFILES

We are a socially and culturally diverse team that includes researchers and emerging scholars, local and Indigenous leaders, experts in sustainability practice, practitioners, and partner organizations. *TRANSECTS* has hubs in Germany, South Africa, and Canada, with six partner universities across these countries, including the University of Saskatchewan, Vancouver Island University, Eberswalde University of Sustainable Development, Rhodes University, the University of the Witwatersrand, and the University of Venda. We also have wonderful partners and collaborators in Argentina, Ghana, Ukraine, the United States, and Zimbabwe. Each newsletter, we intend to profile a small sample.



Dr. Taryn Pereira Kaplan
RHODES



Dr. Peter Spathelf
HNEE

We welcomed many new members to *TRANSECTS* in 2023 and 2024. To learn more, [click on their names](#) to view their profiles on the *TRANSECTS* website.



Dr. Mzukisi Kuse
RHODES



Dr. Henry Penn
THE RESILIENCE INSTITUTE



Dr. Elaina Guilmette
USASK



Dr. Garrett Richards
USASK



Dr. Anil Kumar Chaudhary
PENN STATE